

Criminal Investigation, there were four times the amount of fentanyl pills disguised as prescription drugs in 2022 as compared to the previous year.

We must act now to counter this deadly fentanyl epidemic. We, as lawmakers, should make the distribution of fentanyl resulting in death punishable by Federal felony murder charges. It is past time the consequences for intentionally inflicting an overdose fits the crime.

The cartels producing and smuggling this deadly drug into the United States are also funneling a significant number of illegal firearms and weapons, leading to barbaric violence. Just last week in California, a family of six, including a 10-month-old baby girl, was killed in a drug cartel execution. Unfortunately, the suspects are still at large.

Folks, this death and devastation cannot continue. In the coming weeks, I am looking forward to leading a bicameral delegation to the California-Mexico border. There, we plan to hear directly from Customs and Border Protection personnel about fentanyl and their ongoing drug interdictions. We will tour the port in San Diego—the epicenter for fentanyl trafficking into the United States—and get a firsthand look at the dangerous and critical work our Border Patrol agents are doing day in and day out.

I anticipate a common theme in all of our conversations: the need to physically secure our border, something my colleagues on the other side of the aisle used to support.

In 2007, then-Senator Joe Biden argued:

No great country can say it's secure without being able to secure its borders.

In 2010, Senator CHUCK SCHUMER supported border security and agreed the border lacked “the resources to fully combat the drug smugglers, gun runners, human traffickers, money launderers, and organized criminals that seek to do harm to innocent Americans along our border.”

Amen, folks. I agree with both of them. But where is that same attitude now, when the southern border has become immensely more dangerous, more permeable, and more lethal?

At every single one of my townhalls, over the past 3 weeks, and in dozens of interviews with Iowa media, I was asked about the crisis at the southern border.

So, to those on the left who say this is just a Republican stunt, I think you had better get out of the beltway and into Middle America, hear directly from the people you are supposed to serve, and you will quickly find out it is no stunt; it is reality.

Iowa families want solutions. They want safety, and they want to curtail the ever-increasing access to deadly drugs for their children, and they are not alone. The American people want a solution. In fact, over a majority of Americans—73 percent, according to one Pew Research poll—say they believe we need to increase security along the U.S.-Mexico border.

It is a great place to start, a place to find common ground.

In fact, there are left over border materials from the Trump administration just lying out in the desert, materials that taxpayers have paid for that are just collecting dust. And get this: The Federal Government is actually paying—yes, they have hired contractors, and they spend our tax dollars to do this—to watch over those materials that are lying there in the desert.

Without a secure border, we cannot have a larger conversation about reforming our immigration system.

So maybe, just maybe, a good place to start is for this administration to allow States that want to complete the border barrier to do so, instead of taking them to court.

Besides, doesn't Biden's Justice Department have enough on their hands right now?

So I agree with the Senator from West Virginia that this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I have been on this floor many times to speak to this body about the issue of immigration on our southwest border. It is an issue. It has been an issue for the past couple of years, and, unfortunately, it continues to get worse.

As I talk to people in Oklahoma, they are very open to immigration. They just want legal immigration, and they want our system set up in such a way to incentivize legal immigration. But that is not what is happening right now.

Seven of us, 2 weeks ago, in a bipartisan codel, went to the southwest border, and we spent a couple of days there in the El Paso area and then over into Yuma, AZ, just to be able to visit with the folks on the line, with the folks in the communities, to be able to talk to those individuals who are taking care of human needs, to say: What is going on on the ground? What do we need to know?

I have been to the border many times. So I have had the opportunity to be able to hear some of the other reports, but it is always interesting just to be able to get the perspective of what is happening right now, because, as they say along the border, if you have been to one spot on the border, you have been to one spot on the border because it is different in each area, what they are facing.

Let me give you just one story from this. When we visited with the sheriff

and with the city manager and with the mayor of a small town in Arizona named Yuma, AZ—Yuma, AZ, is right on the border. It is an ag community. If you have eaten a salad in the past year, you have eaten something from Yuma, AZ, because they grow the vast majority of the lettuce for our country. Yuma, AZ, 3 years ago, in that area, had 8,100 people illegally cross in that year. For that one small town, they were trying to manage 8,100 people crossing 3 years ago. This past year, Yuma, AZ, had 310,000 people illegally cross the area.

So in 3 years, they went from 8,000 people illegally crossing to 310,000 people illegally crossing in a year. They are overwhelmed.

May I remind you, the mayor of New York is worried about an additional 40 to 50,000 people in New York City and having a difficult time absorbing that. Yuma, AZ, is trying to figure out how to absorb 310,000 people coming through their community.

The issues are complicated and they are difficult, but they are not unachievable. It is an issue of how are we going to enforce the law.

Now, I would tell you that I have met with the Border Patrol many times over the years, and one of the things they will often talk to me about is that they finally get a break each December because, typically, of Christmas, quite frankly, not as many people cross illegally during Christmastime. They stay home with families. And so December is usually a down month for illegal crossings, and it is year after year after year, until this year.

This year, there was a record number of people illegally crossing in December. So instead of going down, it actually went up when a quarter million people illegally crossed our southwest border in 1 month. That was last month, in December, a quarter million people.

This is a growing issue that requires attention, and it is not just the people this year. It is also all the other complications that come with it, because the Border Patrol is very clear: While we are managing this massive number of people coming from all over the world across that border, we can't go interdict drugs, we can't go interdict other things because we don't have the manpower to be able to do both.

So, again, last month, drug seizures in the United States increased 17.5 percent. In 1 month, it went up. This is an issue that requires real focus, and my concern is that the numbers are so large and it is so out of control that people are just saying: It is too big. I am not going to deal with it.

But the chaos along our border is continuing.

Now, the administration has made some bold statements of late. They said we are going to dramatically increase the number of people who are going to have expedited removal attached to them. Now, that sounds really severe—“expedited removal.” They

are going to have extradited removal when they get there. Except, when we ran the numbers to be able to look at it, at how many people are actually removed who get expedited removal, the number came back 7 percent.

So expedited removal doesn't actually mean removal. It is just a title that is being placed on individuals. So nothing is really changing there.

And as I mentioned before, these are not just individuals from Central America or from Mexico. These are individuals coming from all over the world.

When our bipartisan codel was down on the border a few weeks ago, we watched two individuals who had just been picked up by mounted patrol as they were running across the border. But they were not running faster than the mounted patrol, which was able to catch up with them, and they were able to arrest them. Those two individuals were Chinese nationals who were making their way across the border illegally at night, running from the Border Patrol.

People from all over the world are coming because there is an invitation to illegally cross the border. People are coming right now because it is actually easier to get a job in America. If you are living in another country and you want to work in America, it is easier to get a job in America if you illegally cross.

That is not just me saying that. That is the data saying that. If you are outside the United States and you apply for a work visa and want to be able to come in in a legal, normal process, to be able to go through, currently it is 6½ months to be able to get that work visa—6½ months. But if you illegally cross our border and you are labeled with "parole"—and the mass number of people are labeled with "parole" when they illegally cross our border—you get a work permit within 3 to 4 weeks. So you could legally do this and wait 6½ months or you could illegally do this and you get it in 3 to 4 weeks. Literally, this administration is incentivizing illegal activity with how they are setting up the work permits.

Listen, there are a lot of things this Congress needs to do to be able to deal with illegal immigration. I have stated over and over and over again that the asylum laws need to change. We have got to do a real fix. This is the issue, and it has been multiple administrations that have said that this is the problem. In fact, this administration, just in the last month, has floated the idea of changing the regulation on how they actually handle asylum, and I have affirmed them for that. That has got to change in the way it is being implemented. It also needs to change in law in the way we handle it here.

But there is also the legal process of actually enforcing our laws on the southern border that will make a significant difference not incentivizing individuals to be able to illegally cross our border. There are things the ad-

ministration can do, and they are not doing currently. There are things that this body needs to do that we have not taken up.

Two hundred and fifty thousand people illegally crossed our southwest border last month. When are we going to act on this problem? It needs to be now.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

BORDER SECURITY

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH. Madam President, I started the new year by joining Senator BLACKBURN of Tennessee and our new colleague Senator BRITT of Alabama on a recent tour of the Del Rio Border Sector in Texas.

We traveled to the border to gain more firsthand knowledge of the ongoing mass migration of illegal immigrants into our Nation, to hear from Border Patrol agents about how they are handling this crisis, and to, perhaps more powerfully, hear from young women and girls who are victims of President Biden's careless border and immigration policies.

We learned more how States are taking action to protect their citizens and their borders when the administration won't. Few States are affected more than Texas, which instituted Operation Lone Star in March of 2021 to counter illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

We looked on as a family led by a coyote crossed the Rio Grande in dangerously cold waters and witnessed the family's struggle to help their grandmother wade through rushing waters to enter our Nation illegally. She made it safely across, but, sadly, that is not always the case for many people, including children who have drowned making the same trek under the misguided belief that our borders are open.

We visited a massive migrant processing center where illegal immigrants were taken upon arrival. An astonishing fact about this processing center is that it costs U.S. taxpayers \$16 million a month to operate, and that is just one of five on the southern border. Let me say that again. It is costing American taxpayers \$16 million per month to process illegal immigrants at just one of these five centers.

What was especially gut-wrenching to me was hearing directly from human trafficking victims. We heard from one young lady who was trafficked from the age of 12 to the age of 16. She told a story I will never forget, and there are thousands of stories just like hers.

Yes, we learned about the true severity of the crisis. We learned how Border Patrol agents simply cannot carry out their jobs. We learned how States are forced to use up resources on border security and migrants—resources meant for U.S. citizens. We learned how ranchers and U.S. property owners are being overwhelmed and in constant fear of being robbed and assaulted by

smugglers. We learned how all of this affects our entire Nation—not just the unbelievable pricetag, but in the incidences of human trafficking across the country and tens of thousands of overdose deaths linked to fentanyl smuggled across our border.

And, heartbreakingly, we learned of the wickedness of the cartels. They are thriving, thanks to President Biden's apathetic attitude toward his own country's border.

This should not be a political debate. People and children are dying in an attempt to enter our country illegally. Drug cartels are taking control of not just the border towns on the Mexican side of the border but on the American side too. Human trafficking is now a \$13 billion industry.

How did we get here? Why do they come? Well, because our President basically invited them. Immediately after President Biden was sworn in, he started dismantling vital policies like "Remain in Mexico" and restarted catch-and-release, halted construction on the border, and, essentially, set up a big neon sign on the southwest border that read "Vacant."

The rest is history: 4.5 million border apprehensions with an estimated 1.5 million undetected got-aways, a staggering increase in the number of women and children who are being subject to assault and domestic violence, fentanyl flowing into our communities and skyrocketing deaths.

I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to go and listen to Border Patrol agents. Hear the stories of the cartel victims. See for yourself the heartbreaking scenarios the greatest country in the world is allowing to unfold.

I learned much from my visit to the border, but perhaps the worst thing I learned is this: The Biden administration is not lacking any resources or authority to address this crisis. No, it can support our Border Patrol and border States. It can secure our border. It can save children from dying and drowning in the Rio Grande or 14-year-old girls from being sold. But it won't, either through incompetence or, worse, by design.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. TILLIS. Madam President, I want to thank my friend and colleague from Mississippi for her comments on this subject.

I am down here on the floor to also talk about the crisis at the border—the humanitarian crisis, the Homeland Security crisis, and a crisis that is resulting in cartels making \$800 million a year in human trafficking.

I joined a bipartisan delegation 2 weeks ago. We visited the border. It was very productive. It was one of the first bipartisan delegations in quite some time. The reason that was important is, if you go down there with a